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TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

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Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz reported that Dov Weisglass, senior aide to PM Sharon, asked National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, in talks he held with her over the past two days, for U.S. concessions to Israel in return for disengagement from the territories. Israel Radio says that the talks have been extended and will continue today. Ha'aretz reported that Weisglass presented Sharon's preferred plan: withdrawal from the entire Gaza Strip and six settlements in the northern West Bank -- Ganim, Kadim, Homesh, Sa-Nur, Mevo Dotan and Hermesh. Ha'aretz quoted a source in Jerusalem as saying Wednesday that these were small settlements whose evacuation would provide territorial continuity and roads to the Palestinians in a relatively large area of the northern West Bank, and that greater withdrawal is also expected to lead to greater concession from the U.S. Ha'aretz recalls that the U.S. has asked Israel that disengagement not interfere with the "Bush vision" for the establishment of a Palestinian state, and not be perceived as a "prize for terror." Jerusalem Post quoted diplomatic officials as saying Wednesday that the U.S. is unlikely to publicly or formally recognize Israel's claim to major settlement blocs in the West Bank for a Gaza withdrawal. Israel Radio reported that Stephen Hadley and Elliott Abrams from the White House and William Burns from the State Department will visit Israel next week to continue discussions on Sharon's disengagement plan.

All media highlighted (lead stories in all newspapers except Ha'aretz) the capture Wednesday near Nablus of Husam Abdu, the youngest suicide bomber ever to be caught. IDF soldiers held the 14-and-a-half-year-old Palestinian at bay at a roadblock (at the same spot where an 11-year-old carrying a bag of explosives was caught last week), told him to remove his shirt and instructed him about how to defuse the explosives belt he was carrying. The boy told the soldiers that Fatah militants promised him 70 virgins in paradise and 100 shekels -- about USD 22 -- for his family in return for his blowing himself up. Israel Radio reported that the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades first claimed and then retracted responsibility for the boy's action. Israel Radio reported that politicians from across the spectrum, including Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres, condemned the moral degeneration of the men who sent the would-be suicide bomber. This morning, Israel Radio reported that 60 prominent Palestinian public figures and intellectuals, including legislator Hanan Ashrawi, called on Palestinians, in a paid ad in the PA daily Al Ayyam, not to respond to the killing of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and to abandon the path of violence in favor of a political resolution of the conflict. However, an Israel Radio commentator noted that there is no Arafat associate or influential PA official on the list of signatories.

Leading media reported that Wednesday Hamas political bureau head Khaled Mashal, who operates from Damascus, asserted his primacy over the entire movement. Jerusalem Post and other leading media quoted him as

saying in an interview with the London-based Al-Hayat, that his group is planning to assassinate Sharon. Leading media reported that Wednesday, in talks with reporters, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, the new Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, sought to reassure the U.S. that his group would not attack American targets. He said Hamas would not deviate from its long-standing policy of confining its attacks to Israel and the territories. Leading media quoted PA Chairman Yasser Arafat as saying that he is not afraid of the Israeli threats that he could be next in line for assassination.

Leading media reported that intensive talks are underway among members of the UN Security Council on a new resolution on Monday's killing of Sheikh Yassin by Israel. Israel Radio reported that the resolution draft would include a condemnation of all acts against civilians, but predicted that the U.S. would still veto it. The radio reported that Wednesday the Geneva-based UN Commission on Human Rights condemned Yassin's killing by a roll-call vote of 31 in favor, two against -- Australia and the U.S. -- and 18 abstentions.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that Wednesday, at a meeting with FM Silvan Shalom, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan offered UN assistance to establish law and order in the Gaza Strip after Israel withdraws. Ha'aretz reported that Shalom urged Annan to hold a meeting at the UN General Assembly for a special debate on means to fight terrorism.

Leading media reported that Wednesday the Knesset rejected, 44-43, a bill providing that an evacuation of settlements require the approval of 61 Knesset members. Jerusalem Post notes that Sharon favored the bill.

The media cited statistics presented by police in the West Bank: cases of harassment of Palestinians by Jews have gradually decreased there after 2001. The West Bank police commander also said that several policemen have been forced to move out of the West Bank communities they lived in after being threatened by far-right Jews.

Ha'aretz reported that the committee looking into Israel's intelligence assessments before the war in Iraq criticizes all the intelligence branches for erroneous assessments of Iraq's non-conventional weapons. However, the newspaper says that the committee establishes that the mistakes were not to be considered a failure. Maariv notes that the committee justifies the instruction given to Israelis at the start of the war that they open their gas mask kits, since Israel's intelligence branches had no knowledge of Iraq's WMD capabilities at the time.

All media reported that Wednesday Sharon, at a special Knesset session to mark 25 years of peace with Egypt, reiterated Israel's determination to reach peace with its neighbors. No representatives from Egypt or other Arab countries attended the event.

Yediot reported that Turkey has sharply protested to Israel about a recent GOI travel warning for Istanbul during the Passover holidays (early to mid-April).

Ha'aretz reported that Wednesday 116,000 Internet surfers visited a first-of-its-kind website in support of the Geneva Accord ("the first interactive demonstration in the world"). Ha'aretz doubts whether a "non-virtual" demonstration would have been as successful.

Ha'aretz reported that the police and Shin Bet found that there are "black holes" in the account of freed Hizbullah captive Elchanan Tenenbaum, but that there is insufficient evidence to recommend canceling the immunity deal with him. The final decision in the matter will be made Saturday night at a meeting of investigators.

Maariv quoted Seif al-Islam Qadhafi, the son of Libya's leader Muammar Qadhafi, as telling Qatari reporters Tuesday that Libya intends to discuss granting compensation to Jews who left his country. He invited them to return to Libya and receive citizenship. Leading media reported that Tony Blair will make a "historic" visit to Libya today, in the first such gesture by a British prime minister in 60 years. Ha'aretz reported that Blair will offer military assistance to Libya.

Senegal Appeals Court President Coulibali Lamine was quoted as saying in an interview held in Israel with the Jerusalem Post that Senegal made a mistake in arguing against Israel at the ICJ in The Hague last month. Lamine said: "Every state has to guarantee

security for its people."

Leading media reported that California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and noted American entertainers could cancel their visits to Israel, following the killing of Yassin.

Yediot reported that the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center has embarked upon a campaign to free 12 Iranian Jews who disappeared between 1994 and 1997 during attempts to flee the country. In an unrelated development, Maariv reported that an 18-year-old female Muslim refugee from Iran who came to Israel over three years ago has so far been refused residency in the country.

All media reported on the testimonies given Wednesday at the independent commission investigating the 9/11 attacks. Ha'aretz headlined: "Former Administration Advisor [Richard] Clarke Testified in Congress: 9/11 Attacks Could Have Been Avoided."

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Liberal op-ed writer Yael Paz-Melamed commented in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The cabinet that ... discussed and decided to assassinate Sheikh Yassin two weeks before Passover [the shopping climax of the year] hasn't devoted a single thought to Israel's economic interests."

Conservative columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote in Maariv: "A devil who resides in Nablus, Gaza or Damascus, heartless, devoid of any human feeling, creates these tools of war. Small children who are walking bombs."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Even if the model of peace with Egypt is not the paradigm dreamed of by its signatories ... there is no disputing the fact it has become a firm cornerstone of reality in the Middle East."

Left-leaning contributor Larry Derfner wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The missiles they aimed at Yassin also took out the one light at the end of the tunnel ... the hope of getting out of Gaza and starting to get out of the West Bank."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Government Against its Citizens"

Liberal op-ed writer Yael Paz-Melamed commented in popular, pluralist Maariv (March 25): "According to extremely detailed reports from cabinet discussions before the approval of the assassination [of Sheikh Yassin], none of the participants raised the issue of tourism, for instance. Neither did they ask about the matter of shopping in the malls, which will be severely harmed following the public's fear of coming and buying. This is small fry for a cabinet performing as an expanded General Staff, without anyone taking care of the daily lives of Israel's citizens.... This must be said: Yassin deserved to die, and no Israeli can mourn him. It is also worthwhile recalling that 60 percent of the Israeli public approve the assassination. But I'll only say that the public hears the top military brass repeat at every opportunity mantras meant for suckers. If the public didn't believe that, there would have been a national unity government a long time ago, which would have been convinced that Israel's good lies not only in military victory, which of course is a pseudo-victory. The cabinet that ... discussed and decided to assassinate Sheikh Yassin two weeks before Passover [the shopping climax of the year] hasn't devoted a single thought to Israel's economic interests."

II. "Diabolical Act"

Conservative columnist Avraham Tirosh wrote in Maariv (March 25): "A devil who resides in Nablus, Gaza or Damascus, heartless, devoid of any human feeling, creates these tools of war. Small children who are

walking bombs.... There is not supposed to be any connection between a child, any child -- Jew, Arab or the son of any other nation -- the symbol of purity and wholesomeness, and the devil, the symbol of evil and pollution. But here there is. A diabolical act. It is a diabolical act because it is inconceivable that we are talking about human beings. It is inconceivable that the person who sends children to blow up and to become a paste of flesh and blood spread like manure on the face of the earth, even for the sake of a cause that he perceives to be sacred, is a human being whose heart is capable of feeling compassion and love. Now they will say again: 'What do you want from them, from those devils, it is all because of the oppressive occupation. That is what forces them to take such insane action. They have no choice. Their death and the death of their children is better than their dismal lives.' In other words, Israelis are to blame for their spilt blood. There is a border. A border that, whoever crosses it, even in war, even in the midst of a struggle that he perceives to be most exalted of all, is neither a freedom fighter nor a person fighting for liberation and freedom, but a monster, a devil in human form, who sacrifices even his own children to the Moloch of hatred and insanity. It lies beyond human comprehension."

III. "An Unconditional Peace"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (March 25): "The 25th anniversary of the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt comes at a difficult time for both countries.... Even if the model of peace with Egypt is not the paradigm dreamed of by its signatories, Sadat and Menachem Begin, there is no disputing the fact it has become a firm cornerstone of reality in the Middle East. It was almost self-evident that Israel would ask Egypt to step in to guard the border between Israel and Gaza should Israel withdraw from the Strip. But the importance of the peace goes far beyond that. It proves that even after bitter wars, wise, committed and untiring political efforts to achieve reconciliation can break the cycle of hostility and over time build a proper relationship with Arab countries. This peace, together with the peace with Jordan, have become daily evidence that despite contradictions and even disputes, the countries of the region can live alongside each other with quiet and stable neighborliness."

IV. "Fear and Loathing in Israel"

Left-leaning contributor Larry Derfner wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 25): "The air force just knocked off Gazan terrorist No. 1, and Israelis aren't acting very victorious -- they're afraid to sit in a downtown restaurant again. When the explosions begin, then we'll really have fear, agony, rage, and of course more escalations, and then nobody will be talking anymore about any disengagement plan. It will be too late. I'm afraid it already is.... The missiles they aimed at Yassin also took out the one light at the end of the tunnel that's shone since this war of attrition began -- the hope of getting out of Gaza and starting to get out of the West Bank. It was certainly no sin to kill Yassin, but it was reckless and self-destructive in the extreme, and who knows how many innocents who otherwise would have lived are going to get killed for it?"

12. Campaign Against Terrorism:

Summary:

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The world faces a tough, extended and frustrating war against this new arch-evil -- terror.... In this battle Israel ... can serve as a beacon to the world."

Block Quotes:

"All Quiet on the Appeasement Front"

Settler leader Israel Harel wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 25): "The denunciations of Israel, which boost the confidence of the terrorists, will not do the Europeans any good when Al Qaida decides their time has come, just as fascism was unimpressed by the capitulation to its advances. After all, it was Spain, one of the European countries most critical toward Israel, that suffered the worst act of terror since the attack on America. Could there be a

clearer message than this that there is no hope for appeasement?.... Neither the actions nor the failures or the U.S. created Al Qaida. Nor is Western civilization to blame that Muslims in Algeria massacre whole villages of their coreligionists -- sometimes hundreds of souls in a single night --with their women and children, and the world remains silent. The world faces a tough, extended and frustrating war against this new arch-evil -- terror. But despite the European cowardice -- even betrayal -- the world will win. In this battle Israel, despite the weakness encompassing it at times -- the result of the continuous psychological warfare being waged against it from within and without -- can serve as a beacon to the world, lighting the path -- the ethical one, too -- to victory."

KURTZER